

What happens when a marine mammal strands?

Once a stranded marine mammal is reported to the hotline (1-877-942-5343), a trained network responder will arrive on scene to evaluate the situation and equipment needed. If the animal is alive, the animal's health will be assessed by an authorized veterinarian. Based on the condition of the live animal, it will be released, taken to an authorized rehabilitation facility, or euthanized. In many cases, animals that strand are in poor condition and the most humane option to prevent suffering is euthanasia. If the stranded animal is dead, a necropsy (animal autopsy) will either be conducted on the beach or in a special necropsy lab. If the necropsy is conducted on the beach, the remains will either be buried or taken off-site. Even if the dead stranded marine mammal is decomposed, stranding network members can still collect data and samples to gain useful information.

Why do marine mammals strand?

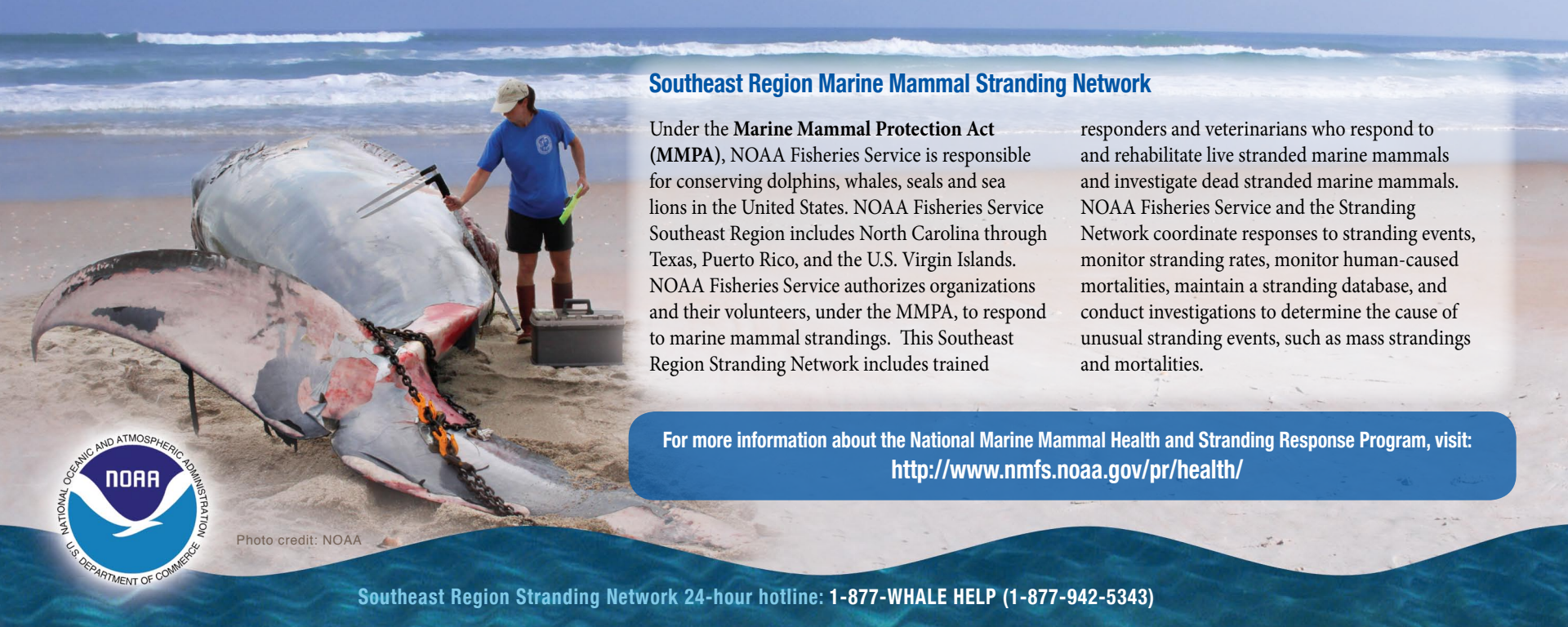
Some identified causes have included diseases, parasites, boat or ship strikes, entanglement in fishing gear, pollution exposure, starvation, and harmful algal blooms, such as red tide. In addition, strandings often occur after unusual weather or oceanographic events. In many cases, the cause of stranding remains unknown.



Photo credit: NOAA NMFS Beaufort

What can we learn from marine mammal strandings?

Strandings provide scientists and managers with important information on the biology and health of marine mammals and, in turn, the health of our marine ecosystems. They provide basic information on the biology and ecology of marine mammal species, such as an animal's range, age, the types of prey it consumes, and the occurrence of diseases within populations. In fact, some marine mammal species are known only from stranded specimens. Strandings also provide important information on human impacts to marine mammals. Data collected from stranded animals teach us about interactions between marine mammals and fisheries, vessels, or marine debris. Samples collected from stranded marine mammals also provide information on marine pollution. For example, a dolphin that may have high levels of chemical contaminants in their body could have direct implications for human health, as they consume many of the same fish that we do.



Southeast Region Marine Mammal Stranding Network

Under the **Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA)**, NOAA Fisheries Service is responsible for conserving dolphins, whales, seals and sea lions in the United States. NOAA Fisheries Service Southeast Region includes North Carolina through Texas, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NOAA Fisheries Service authorizes organizations and their volunteers, under the MMPA, to respond to marine mammal strandings. This Southeast Region Stranding Network includes trained

responders and veterinarians who respond to and rehabilitate live stranded marine mammals and investigate dead stranded marine mammals. NOAA Fisheries Service and the Stranding Network coordinate responses to stranding events, monitor stranding rates, monitor human-caused mortalities, maintain a stranding database, and conduct investigations to determine the cause of unusual stranding events, such as mass strandings and mortalities.

For more information about the National Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program, visit:
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health/>



Photo credit: NOAA

Southeast Region Stranding Network 24-hour hotline: 1-877-WHALE HELP (1-877-942-5343)



How can you help a stranded marine mammal?

Photo credit: Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute



What is a stranding?

Marine mammals are sometimes found sick, injured, or dead along our beaches. They can also become entrapped or disoriented and unable to return to their natural habitat without assistance. These events are called strandings and require investigation by trained Marine Mammal Stranding Network personnel.

What should you do if you see a dead or live stranded marine mammal?

Immediately call your state's Marine Mammal Stranding Network contact number. If uncertain who to call, please contact the **Southeast Region Stranding Network 24-hour hotline: 1-877-942-5343**. Note the exact location of the stranded animal and leave a number where you can be reached if rescuers need more details. Some questions you can expect to be asked include:

1. Is the marine mammal alive?
2. What is the exact location of the animal?
3. What species is the animal, if known, or describe the animal's size, color, and physical characteristics.
4. How many animals are there?
5. What are the current environmental conditions? (weather, sea state, tide)
6. How can you be contacted?

The stranding network will then call trained responders who will get to the scene quickly with appropriate equipment.

All marine mammals are federally protected by the Marine **Mammal Protection Act (MMPA)**. Only local and state officials and people authorized by the **NOAA Fisheries Service** may legally handle live and dead marine mammals.

Photo credit: Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute

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Photo credit: NOAA

DO's and DON'T's

- **DON'T push the animal back out to sea.** Stranded marine mammals may be sick or injured. Returning animals to sea delays examination and treatment and often results in the animal re-stranding in worse condition.
- If the animal returns to the water on its own, **DON'T attempt to swim with it.**
- **DO put human safety above animal safety.** If conditions are dangerous, do not attempt to approach the animal.
- **DO stay with the animal until rescuers arrive,** but use caution. Marine mammals can be dangerous and/or carry disease. Keep a safe distance from the head and tail. Also, minimize contact with the animal (use gloves if necessary) and avoid inhaling the animal's expired air.



Photo credit: Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute

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DO's and DON'T's

- If the animal is alive, **DO keep its skin moist and cool by splashing water over its body.** Use wet towels to help keep the skin moist and prevent sunburn.
- If the animal is alive, **DON'T cover or obstruct the blowhole.** Try to keep sand and water away from the blowhole.
- **DO keep crowds away and noise levels down** to avoid causing further stress to the animal.
- **DO report all dead marine mammals**, even if they are decomposed.
- **DO keep dogs/pets away** from the live or dead marine mammal.
- **DON'T collect any parts (tissues, teeth, bones, or gear, etc.) from dead animals.** They are still covered by the Marine Mammal Protection Act.



Photo credit: Wells - Chicago Zoological Society



Photo credit: NOAA

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